

Bridging Generations: Old Novels, New Questions in Ike and Beti's Advocacy

Paul Akika Okun

Directorate of General Studies, David Umahi Federal University of Health Sciences, Uburu, Nigeria.

*Corresponding Author: Paul Akika Okun. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6494-367X>

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>Contemporary African societies continue to face social problems such as corruption, poor leadership, examination malpractice, religious hypocrisy, and gender based oppression. Although many African countries have gained political independence for decades, these problems remain part of everyday life. This study examines how literature can respond to such challenges by exploring the role of selected novels by Chukwuemeka Ike and Mongo Beti as forms of social advocacy and consciousness raising. It focuses on Ike's Expo 77 and Our Children Are Coming, and Beti's The Poor Christ of Bomba and Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness. The study adopts a postcolonial approach, drawing particularly on Gayatri Spivak's concept of subalternity, to examine how the two writers represent marginalized people and question the structures that keep them powerless. Through textual analysis, the study considers the narrative strategies and social concerns that shape the four novels, while also comparing the ways Ike and Beti respond to problems in their different Nigerian and Cameroonian settings. The study finds that both writers use fiction to confront social realities rather than simply describe them. Ike exposes examination malpractice, parental irresponsibility, corruption, and failures in leadership, while Beti draws attention to religious hypocrisy, colonial exploitation, and postcolonial authoritarianism. Despite their different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, both writers show a strong commitment to using literature to question injustice and encourage social awareness. The study therefore affirms the continuing relevance of African literature as a space for social criticism, giving voice to marginalized people and imagining the possibility of meaningful change.</i> Keywords: Novelist, Social Advocate, Postcolonialism, Subalternity, Postcolonial Criticism.
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Introduction

It is important to recognize that the African novelist occupies a pivotal role to play in shaping and accessing society. The relationship between the writer and his community is symbiotic, where the writer simply mirrors and reflects societal goings-on. However, the concepts of advocate and advocacy carry weight that demands careful exploration. Tracing back to its Latin origins, the term advocate derives from advocatus, a word used to describe one who pleads on behalf of another. Advocacy itself involves that generous act of intervening for others, seeking to rescue them from forces that oppress, marginalize, or dehumanize them. An advocate therefore steps forward to address those in authority, exposing what is harmful in society, and often inspiring others to join in spreading those ideals. Rebecca Cech in her doctoral

thesis, "Advocacy Literature: African Warscapes, International Community, And Popular Narratives for Emerging Human Rights Norms," draws on Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* to illustrate how literary advocacy functions in practice. Cech observes:

Since the publication of Saro-Wiwa's novel, personal accounts of youth's participation in battle have been increasingly employed as a vehicle to condemn children's participation in armed conflict and to underwrite or provide leverage for a variety of legal and humanitarian responses. Stories about the "child soldier problem" appeared with increasing frequency, especially after 2000, when the concern gained

very specific institutional attention.... (39)

What Cech illuminates is the powerful role that fiction can play in shaping public discourse and influencing policy responses to social crises, a role that became particularly evident in the growing condemnation of child soldiering following the publication of *Sozaboy*.

Beyond Cech's insights, we must also consider the work of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who has consistently argued that literature in Africa must serve a liberating function. In his seminal work *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ contends that "the writer's task is not merely to entertain but to participate in the struggle for genuine independence and cultural liberation," (Ngũgĩ 85–87) which involves reclaiming cultural identity and challenging neocolonial structures. For Ngũgĩ, the novelist bears a responsibility to speak against oppression in all its forms and to imagine alternative futures for the continent. This perspective resonates deeply with the concerns of this study, as both Ike and Beti demonstrate a similar commitment to using fiction as a weapon against social injustice.

Elisha Bazzani, in *Advocacy: A brief history*, reminds us that "the roots of advocacy stretch back to ancient Rome and Greece, where accomplished orators either acted as advocates themselves or composed speeches meant to plead another person's cause." (1) From this historical perspective, advocacy can be understood as a voluntary undertaking by individuals or groups who share common concerns about a social problem, who bring it to public attention, and who engage with authorities in hopes of improving or reversing an undesirable situation. This tradition of speaking on behalf of the vulnerable has deep historical roots and continues to find expression in contemporary literary practice. Indeed, the very essence of advocacy lies in the recognition that some voices are more powerful than others, and that those who possess privilege or authority have a responsibility to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. This principle, as ancient as it is modern, finds one of its most potent expressions in the work of the novelist.

The health and progress of any society depend on the collective contributions of its members, each playing their part. Within this framework, the novelist occupies a uniquely important space. Beyond providing entertainment, the novelist employs satire as a weapon to lay bare society's weaknesses, aiming to provoke positive change and secure communal welfare. Jude Agho, in *The Novel in Africa*, argues compellingly that:

... Satire as an artistic medium must eventuate in reformation, properly understood and applied. The reason why a writer satirizes an object, a character on an institution... is to reform the butt

of his satire, so that a positive change is made possible. Understood in this sense, the writer functions as the conscience of his society; he is a barometer gauging the pulse of the society and dictating at varying times the stresses and tensions latent in the society, but he must continuously point out the way from the socio-political morass in the society. (228-229)

Zoey Wilson and Christiana Bradic have observed that advocacy in "various forms have existed long before any formal system were established and remains vitally relevant today. One can see evidence of this throughout history and even within sacred texts." (5) They point to the biblical account of Moses and Aaron, whom God commissioned to confront Pharaoh on behalf of the oppressed Israelites, demanding their release from bondage so they could worship freely. The Quran offers a parallel narrative in Surat Ta Ha, where Allah directly addresses Moses declaring that:

I have prepared thee for Myself (for service) Go, thou and thy brother, with My signs. And slacken not either of you, in keeping me in remembrance. Go, both of you to Pharaoh for he has indeed transgressed all bounds. But speak to him mildly perchance, he may take warning or fear Allah. (877).

In both these sacred accounts, God sends Moses and Aaron as advocates before Pharaoh, championing the cause of the defenseless Israelites who suffered oppression, marginalization, and dehumanization. This suggests that advocacy is not a recent invention but an ancient and enduring practice. E.W. Timberlake, in "Origin and Development of Advocacy as a Profession," affirms that:

Advocacy is one of the most ancient and Honorable of all callings. From time immemorial the principle that a person has the right to select another to plead his cause has been recognized. Many of the great orators of Greece and Rome, though in a manner differing from that of modern times, performed the functions of advocates, and many of their most famous orations were composed for that purpose. (25)

Martin Luther, the German monk and professor who ignited the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, stands as one of history's most consequential advocates due to the seismic shifts he provoked within the Catholic Church. He produced numerous theses, many of which the Pope condemned as heretical because of their radical challenge to established practices. Ultimately, Luther succeeded in fracturing Western Christendom into

Catholic and Protestant camps, from which countless denominations have since emerged. His example demonstrates how advocacy can fundamentally reshape institutions and belief systems.

Another towering figure in the history of advocacy is the American civil rights leader Martin Luther King Junior. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1929, his brief but extraordinary life of thirty nine years was devoted to the liberation of his people through writings, speeches, and direct action. Smith Davies, in *Speeches that Changed the World*, provides essential context for King's emergence as an advocate. The catalyst came in 1955, when Rosa Parks, a Black seamstress, refused to surrender her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery bus. The event is described as follows:

...a black seamstress took a seat in the section of a Montgomery bus reserved for whites. When the driver asked her to move to the back under the state's segregation law, she refused and was arrested, shortly after this, King arrived in town and launched the Montgomery Bus Boycott. After deliberating for over a year, the Supreme Court ruled that Montgomery's segregation laws were unconstitutional and ordered the integration of the city's buses. (149)

King also campaigned for Black voting rights and led the historic March on Washington, where 250,000 people gathered and heard his immortal "I have a dream" address. His life was tragically cut short by assassination in Memphis, Tennessee, where he had gone to support striking sanitation workers.

Long before the emergence of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey had already established himself as one of the most influential advocates of Black dignity, self-determination, and racial consciousness in the early twentieth century. Born in Jamaica in 1887, Garvey became a major figure in the Pan African movement through the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which he founded in 1914. His advocacy challenged the social and political conditions that kept people of African descent at the margins of power. Rather than seeking only integration into existing structures, Garvey promoted Black self-reliance and argued that Black people needed to develop the confidence, institutions, and economic strength necessary to determine their own future. Through speeches, newspapers, public meetings, and organized campaigns, he encouraged Black people to reject ideas of racial inferiority and to take pride in their African heritage.

Justification of the Study

Before we proceed further, we must address a fundamental

question: why does the literary artist matter? Why should we care about what novelists have to say about social issues? The answer lies in the unique position that writers occupy within society. They are not merely observers but active participants in the ongoing conversation about how we should live together. To establish the artist's significance, we must consider the insights of several scholars who have reflected on this question.

Emmanuel Ngara, in his important work *Art and Ideology in the African Novel*, argues that African writers have historically seen themselves as engaged intellectuals whose work is inseparable from the political and social struggles of their time. For Ngara, the African novelist is not content with aesthetic experimentation alone but feels compelled to address the pressing concerns of his society. (1) This engaged stance distinguishes African literature from purely formalist traditions and gives it a distinctive character rooted in the continent's history of colonialism and struggle for liberation.

Similarly, Abiola Irele, in *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*, contends that the African writer operates within a context of cultural and political crisis that demands a response. He argues that the significance of African writing lies partly in the testimony it offers of an unfolding African experience, while literature also reconstructs the states of consciousness produced by that experience (1–2). Irele suggests that the novelist's role is to articulate the aspirations and anxieties of his people, to give voice to their hopes and frustrations, and to contribute to the construction of a new social order. This understanding of the writer as a cultural worker and social critic is central to appreciating why Ike and Beti's novels remain relevant today.

Lewis Nkosi, in *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature*, offers a related perspective on the relationship between artistic expression and social engagement in African literature. His discussion places African writing within its social, historical, and ideological circumstances while also drawing attention to questions of literary form and technique. The idea of the writer's "task" alongside the literary "mask" captures this tension between social responsibility and aesthetic expression.

The role of the artist as revealed by these scholars is self-imposed, representing a commitment to revolution, a responsibility that places him at war with his society and ultimately a rebel with a cause. Anyanwu Patricia Ngozi in an article, "The African Novelist and the Nation: A post-colonial Reading of Chukwuemeka Ike's *Our Children Are Coming* (1990) affirms that the ultimate aim of the writer at all times, ... "is to engage his artistic

impetus in raising readers' consciousness to the prevailing deviations from the promises of independence as well as create an awareness on the need to engender the desired change in the nation" (158). In a similar vein, Agwuncha Nwankwo, in the essay "The Writer and the Politics of his Environment," contends that "the patriotic writer scrutinizes his immediate socio political environment, identifies its deficiencies, and works diligently through his writing to reform society." (27) These perspectives confirm that the literary artist's role is indispensable to the social, political, and economic renewal of society.

Although the novels selected for this study may not be considered contemporary by some standards, the issues they address remain pressing, relevant, and timeless. Literature that truly advocates must engage with universal human experiences and explore themes that retain their significance across different eras, transcending the particular historical moment of their creation. Meaningful literature should speak to people across generations by delving into fundamental human emotions and enduring truths. The persistence of corruption, the failure of leadership, the exploitation of the vulnerable, and the erosion of moral values are not problems confined to any particular period but recurring challenges that demand ongoing attention.

Postcoloniality

Edward Said, a Palestinian American scholar trained at Harvard who taught literature at Columbia University until his death in 2003, developed Post-Colonial theory within literary criticism. His work, particularly *Orientalism*, fundamentally transformed how we understand the relationship between knowledge and power in the colonial context. Said argued that Western representations of the Orient were not innocent descriptions but rather constructions that served to justify and perpetuate colonial domination. This insight has profound implications for understanding African literature, which emerged partly as a response to these colonial representations and as an assertion of African agency and identity. The theory, as Lufti Hamadi posits in an article, "Edward Said: The Post-Colonial Theory and the Literature of Decolonization" "... traces European colonialism of many regions all over the world, its effects on various aspects of the lives of the colonized people and its manifestations in the Western literary and philosophical heritage" (40). During the colonial period which spanned between the 1500s and the 1960s, nearly all the regions of the world were under European subjugation. In Africa, only Liberia was spared. Consequently, Edward Said affirms as Hamadi puts it, that the effects of European imperialism "... are still persisting in the form of chaos, coups, corruption, civil wars and bloodshed which permeate many ex-colonies" (40).

Ambesange Praveen, in an article, "Postcolonialism: Edward said & Gayatri Spivak" presents a compactly comprehensive explanation of post colonialism, when he writes that:

Post colonialism is a term largely used to refer to all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the time of colonization to our own time.... It attempts to examine and analyzes the aftermath of colonization; that of restoring the identity of the independent oriental nations by removing misconceptions about the Orientals. It includes literature of nations such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Kenya, India, Pakistan, Jamaica and more countries which were once colonized by British. These countries are also called Third world countries. (47-48)

The overriding aim of post colonialism as Ambesange puts it: is "to decanter/deconstruct the Eurocentrism or Eurocentric beliefs" (48).

Edward Said's Post-Colonial Theory and the concept of *Orientalism* gave rise to Gayatri Spivak's concept of subalternity, which as earlier mentioned, involves the art of speaking for the voiceless many. This thesis will, therefore, be specifically hinged on Gayatri Spivak's concept of subalternity since its entire focus will be on how Mongo Beti and Chukwuemeka Ike have used their novels as instruments to speak for the defenseless and voiceless 'subalterns' in their individual regions, nay Africa in general.

The term subaltern, in military usage, refers to someone of lower rank. Spivak adapts this term to distinguish between the bourgeoisie and the common masses. The subalterns are the ordinary people, the dregs of society who may be observed but never heard. Spivak, according to Ambesange Praveen, "... realizes herself sometimes as Third-world woman, as a marginal awkward special guest, an American professor, a Bengali middle class exile, and a success story in the American academic star system" (6). Despite her prestigious academic position and her stature as a literary theorist, her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" has brought her worldwide recognition. In this essay, Spivak denounces Western Eurocentrism and, as Praveen reveals, exposes "the irony that subalterns have awakened to consciousness of their rights by making practical utterances against unjust domination and inequality. She condemns the harm inflicted on women, Third World women, and non-Europeans, and seeks to give voice to the subalterns who cannot speak or remain silent..." (8).

One of the most significant contributions of postcolonial theory has been its insistence on the importance of

representation. Who speaks for whom? Whose stories are told and whose are silenced? These questions are central to understanding how literature functions as advocacy. When Ike and Beti write about the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, they are engaging in a form of representation that challenges dominant narratives and asserts the dignity of those who have been denied a voice. Their novels are not merely aesthetic objects but political interventions that seek to reshape how we understand African societies and their challenges.

Conceptual Explanation

At this point, we should clarify that this study aims to investigate how two African novelists, Chukwuemeka Ike and Mongo Beti, have drawn on various themes to achieve their underlying purpose of social advocacy. From the extensive literary output of each author, selected novels have been chosen for examining social advocacy within the distinct cultural contexts in which each writes. The selection is deliberate, designed to enable a comparison of experiences across regional divides, allowing us to see both the specificities of each national context and the shared concerns that unite African writers across colonial and linguistic boundaries.

Literature in all its genres can be described as imaginative art designed to reflect human reality. It is often called the mirror of society, but Antonia Hayes offers a different perspective in *Advocacy*: "Can fiction be used to elicit change", declaring that "literature is not a mirror but a hammer: it does not merely reflect, it shapes." (26) Hayes' insight is compelling, because upon reflection, we see that the novelist uses themes to hold a mirror up to society for readers to perceive, but the purpose of that reflection is ultimately to reshape society. Beyond its conventional functions of educating and entertaining, every work of fiction carries an underlying motif and motive. These two elements are not mutually exclusive, as the former is essential to achieving the latter. In essence, the themes writers explore help them accomplish their communicative goals. Benaron Naomi in the article "Fiction and Social Responsibility: Where Do They Intersect?" believes that someone should be able to read a novel and be moved to say, "there must be something I can do" and beyond that to do it" (5). This is the target of literary advocacy. While themes could vary from culture to culture, Laurie Kirschner and Stephen Mandell in *Literature: Reading Reacting*, Writing identifies some conventional themes explored in literary works to include:

... the individual's quest for spiritual enlightenment... the nostalgia for a vanished past, the disillusionment of adulthood, the pain of love, the struggle of women for equality, the conflict between parents and children, the clash between

civilization and the wilderness, the evils of unchecked ambition, the inevitability of fate, the impact of the past on the present, the conflict between ideal and the actual realm of experience.

(3)

Several of these themes appear in the primary texts selected for this discussion. The authors' motive, which is advocacy, forms the core of this paper. Literature as an art form has the power to move readers to action, persuade them, or even compel them to reconsider deeply held views or reassess their positions on the issues the writer raises. A writer can also tap into the spirit of the age and use fiction to comment on, react to, or draw attention to contemporary social concerns. This is part of social responsibility, the obligation to act for the benefit of the wider community. It is clear from this description that social advocacy and social responsibility are two sides of the same coin. When the novelist engages in social advocacy, the social responsibility obligation is simultaneously fulfilled. The significance of advocacy in African literature derives from the social function of literature, particularly fiction. As Atere Isaac tells us in his book, *The Novelist as a Social Advocate*,

The novelist has one great responsibility, that is, to be committed to the social problems of the moment because literature is judged in relation to its social function. The writer does not write in a vacuum, and so he has the responsibility of re-education and regeneration of his people against the mental picture of corruption and social decadence which are fast becoming endemic inheritance in our society. In doing this, he uses his art to complain. (9)

Many African novelists have drawn on themes shaped by the spirit of their times to achieve their individual artistic and social purposes. Chinua Achebe, for instance, in *Things Fall Apart*, examines the devastating impact of colonialism on African culture and traditional institutions. His protagonist, Okonkwo, represents a strong attachment to Igbo traditions in the face of the growing influence of the Western colonial order. Although Okonkwo ultimately dies without being able to preserve the world he knows, Achebe's criticism of colonial disruption and its consequences is unmistakable. In *Arrow of God*, we encounter Ezeulu, a traditional priest who struggles to maintain his authority and cultural independence in the face of colonial intervention. In his most satirical work, *A Man of the People*, Achebe turns his attention to corruption, which remains a major obstacle to Africa's political and economic development. The novel confronts corruption in post-independence Nigeria with remarkable frankness and bold realism.

In the Francophone West African context, Ferdinand Oyono, the Cameroonian statesman, actor, and novelist, speaks against Africans' fascination with the white man's world, while also exposing the illusion of moral superiority and hypocrisy of the white man in his diary novel, *The Houseboy*. The driving force of African fiction, as these examples illustrate, is largely a protest against the many evils perpetrated in Africa during the colonial era. This tradition of protest, however, did not end with colonialism. It has continued into the postcolonial period, as African writers have increasingly turned their attention to the failures, contradictions, and disappointments of independent African governments.

Mariama Ba stands as one of the most prominent literary advocates in French speaking Senegal. In her epistolary novel, *So Long a Letter*, she challenges the Senegalese Islamic model of marriage, in which women are often treated as insignificant figures who can be pushed aside when a husband chooses another wife. The protagonist's marginalization begins when Binetou enters Modou Fall's family as a second wife. The deliberate actions of the ill matched couple deepen Ramatoulaye's already painful experience and leave her struggling with betrayal and emotional suffering. From this point, the narrative becomes increasingly poignant, punctuated by the recurring refrain, "I survived." Ba's novel shows how feminist advocacy can become part of a wider criticism of social customs and religious practices that limit women's dignity and freedom.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in her debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, advocates against domestic violence and gender inequality. Domestic violence, which is largely gender based, cuts across cultures, races, and social classes. A central concern in *Purple Hibiscus* is the need to change the attitudes and behaviour of those responsible for this social scourge, with the ultimate goal of creating a society where people can live together in peace and dignity. Adichie's work represents a more recent contribution to the tradition of literary advocacy, showing that the tradition remains vibrant and relevant in contemporary African literature.

In Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, corruption takes centre stage in the author's advocacy. Armah uses scatological images, including feces, maggots, phlegm, and vulgar language, to expose political corruption and social decay. At the centre of the novel is a protagonist simply known as The Man, a railway worker who struggles with political corruption, family pressures, and disillusionment in a postcolonial setting. He faces pressure from family members and corrupt colleagues to accept bribes to meet his family's needs, but he remains committed to his principles and

refuses to compromise. Armah's novel therefore becomes a powerful indictment of the moral decay that has followed political independence in many African societies.

To conclude this conceptual explanation, it is worth noting that advocacy in fiction is universal and that it does not only capture corruption, irresponsible leadership or the marginalization of women as some of the examples reveal. Diniejko Andrzej in the article "Charles Dickens as Social Commentator and Critic" tells us that:

Charles Dickens was not only the first great urban novelist in England, but also one of the most important social commentators who used fiction effectively to criticize economic, social and moral abuses in the Victorian era. Dickens showed compassion and empathy towards the vulnerable and disadvantaged segments of English society and contributed to several important social reforms. (12)

This demonstrates that the tradition of literary advocacy is not confined to Africa but is a global phenomenon, reflecting the universal human desire for justice and dignity.

Social Advocacy in Selected Novels of Chukwuemeka Ike and Mongo Beti

To ensure a reasonably comprehensive presentation, selected novels from each author have been earmarked for this study. From the Anglophone West African region, specifically Nigeria, we have Chukwuemeka Ike's *Expo 77* and *Our Children Are Coming*, and from the Francophone region of Cameroon, we have Mongo Beti's *The Poor Christ of Bomba* and *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*. This selection allows us to compare how writers from different colonial and linguistic traditions address similar social concerns, revealing both commonalities and differences in their approaches.

I firmly believe that this study will prove informative and educational for everyone concerned with societal advancement, leaders and followers alike. We should recognize that in evaluating society, the novelist does not only criticize those in power but also the followers, since they too have their shortcomings. As Newstorm J.W. and Bittel L.R. state in *Supervision: Managing for Results*, "leaders cannot focus exclusively on leadership if followership is ineffective" (252). They insist that followership is a role that must be balanced with leadership responsibilities. This insight is crucial for understanding the comprehensive nature of Ike and Beti's critique, which does not spare any segment of society from examination. In Chukwuemeka Ike's novel *Our Children Are Coming*, leaders, parents, and even children all come under the author's critical gaze. Anyanwu P.

Ngozi again notes that "Ike exposes the high degree of nepotism and economic waste that have long kept the nation behind the wheels of progress and development" (161). He also reveals the iniquities of parents who, through shameless conduct, have lost the moral path their children should follow. This is evident in characters like the adulterous Chief Mrs. Edo, who serves on the Presidential Commission on Juveniles, and the Chairman, Justice Okpetun, who dates Appolonia, a girl young enough to be his grandchild. In exposing Appolonia, the author also reveals the flaws of the youth, showing that he does not spare them from criticism. Ike's willingness to criticize all segments of society, not just the powerful, distinguishes his advocacy from mere political polemic and elevates it to a more comprehensive moral critique.

The importance of Ike's critical stance lies in his refusal to offer simple answers to complex social problems. Rather than condemning any single group one dimensionally, he shows how corruption and moral decay operate as interconnected systems that implicate everyone. Parents who sacrifice integrity for material gain, leaders who exploit positions for personal enrichment, and young people who abandon ethical principles for quick advancement all participate in a cycle of dysfunction that perpetuates social stagnation. This thorough critique elevates Ike's advocacy beyond mere moralizing to the level of sophisticated social analysis that recognizes the structural nature of Africa's postcolonial challenges. The novel functions as a diagnostic tool, exposing the pathologies afflicting Nigerian society while implicitly calling for a collective reexamination of values and priorities.

In Ike's *Expo 77*, Ike tackles examination malpractice with patriotic passion and blames parents who insist on accelerating the progress of their dull and lazy children. He demonstrates the long term effects of examination malpractice on the nation's economy and offers a blueprint to prevent future occurrences. Oseni Abubakar Idris, in "Effect of Examination Malpractice on Nigerian Graduate Productivity in the Labour Market Crew," explains that:

Most of the social ills, including medical malpractice by incompetent doctors, manufacture and sales of fake drugs by pharmacists, collapse of buildings designed by fraudulent engineers, massive fraud in banks, Miscarriage of Justice, rigging of election by unelected politicians, poor quality pastors who take advantage of their members, mass failure in examination etc. are consequences of examination malpractice and all these will impede productivity in the country. (83)

Ike's focus on education is particularly significant because

education is the foundation upon which future generations are built. When the educational system is corrupted, the entire society suffers.

Ike agrees that the corruption of national leaders has driven young people to engage in such unethical behaviour. The examination hall becomes a microcosm of the larger society, where shortcuts and dishonest practices have displaced diligence and merit. By focusing on education, Ike addresses the very foundation on which future generations are built, recognizing that academic corruption threatens the nation's future. The novel's title, *Expo 77*, references an actual examination scandal in Nigeria, grounding fiction in historical reality and lending urgency to its advocacy. This fusion of fiction with documented social crisis exemplifies the novelist's commitment to engaging with tangible, urgent issues rather than retreating into abstract concerns.

In *The Poor Christ of Bomba*, Mongo Beti criticizes Christianity, the hypocrisy that characterizes some believers, and the endemic moral decay pervading the village of Bomba in colonial Cameroon, which he presents as a microcosm of the entire African continent. In an age of many false "Men of God" who use religion to keep their followers in perpetual subjugation, the relevance of this study cannot be overstated. Moral decay as depicted in Bomba, and by extension the continent, especially among the young, constitutes a pressing contemporary issue. In *Religion and Its Positive Values: A Philosophical Analysis*, Toluwalase Ajayi explains that "morality as an ethical concept aims to guide people in practicing right conduct and living the good life. It tells what people ought to do and what they ought to think it is right to do." (82) Thus, by exposing moral decay in Africa through Bomba, Beti responds to the situation and informs everyone, as Ajayi says, what they "ought to do and what they ought to think is right to do." (82) Morality, as Adetuyi Chris Ajibade also declares in "Thematic Preoccupation of Nigerian Literature: A Critical Approach," is determined according to specific contexts. "What is wrong for some may be acceptable for others." (22) However, we should note that social problems such as corruption and hypocrisy, which partly concern morality, remain despicable in any context.

Beti's critique of Christianity operates on multiple levels simultaneously. On the surface, the novel condemns the moral failures of individual missionaries and African converts, but beneath this obvious critique lies a deeper indictment of colonialism itself. The Christian mission in Bomba functions as an arm of colonial domination, imposing European values while undermining indigenous social structures. The missionaries' hypocrisy, preaching moral purity while engaging in exploitative relationships

with African women, mirrors the larger hypocrisy of colonialism, which claimed to bring civilization while practicing systematic oppression. Beti's irony and satire throughout the novel undermine both religious and colonial institutions, exposing the gap between their professed ideals and actual practices. The novel thus serves as a powerful work of anticolonial advocacy, challenging specific abuses and the entire ideological framework that justified European domination of Africa.

A significant portion of Mongo Beti's novels are characterized by protest, falling into what Jude Agho in *Standpoints on the African Novel* classifies as novels "focusing on critical self-examination and censuring all social ills and failings of postcolonial African governments." (14) *The Poor Christ of Bomba* targets Christianity and colonial exploitation, while *Mission to Kala* denounces the French colonial education system, what Shatto Gakwandi in *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa* calls "the alienating influence of foreign education." (42) Though Eustace Palmer, as Gakwandi notes, argues "that the novel does not attack colonial education or western civilization but instead satirizes half-baked young men who, through partial exposure to western civilization, feel superior to their fellow countrymen." (42) In King Lazarus, among other works, we encounter a central concern with the imposition of Christianity on native populations. Beti's critique is thus multifaceted, addressing both the colonial system and its internalization by Africans.

Leadership in Africa, whether dictatorial or democratic, has over the years been depressingly irresponsible, taking its toll on the continent's economic progress. It is generally believed that Africa's problem lies in poor leadership. Africa is poor because it is poorly governed. In "Machiavellianism and Leadership in Africa," Kevin Arua references Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* in describing leadership in Africa:

Machiavellianism is a kind of political system adopted by most leaders in Africa, a situation where leadership is an inspiration by the devil to lead "good men" to their doom. Machiavellianism is an understanding of politics as a domain that embraces naked self-interest, the maintenance of rulership at all cost; the utility of unethical behaviour, and the centrality of power as end that justifies any means. (15)

The manifestations of Machiavellianism, to use Arua's term, are glaring in the leadership attitudes of many African leaders. Neil Blandford and Bruce Jones, in *The World's Most Evil Men*, chronicle the reigns of some notoriously vicious world leaders, described as "regimes

whose rule is terror led by men for whom power has meant a license to corrupt, maim, and murder." (ii) One major African leader who makes this list of evil men is the late Idi Amin of Uganda, who in eight years of ruling his country in a torrent of blood and terror "had 500,000 of his fellow Ugandans ruthlessly and systematically butchered, ordered the grisly mutilation of one of his wives, and killed crusading clergymen, nosy journalists, his own diplomats, and a helpless elderly hijack hostage." (1) This represents the extreme of maniacal desire to annihilate one's own people. Democratic eras in Africa have fared no better, as inconceivable vices such as electoral irregularities continue to characterize them. For instance, Yahaya I.I., in "Democratic Process in Nigeria: An Appraisal of the Conduct of Elections Since 1999," reminds us that:

Series of irregularities characterized the general election held in Nigeria on the 14th and the 21st of April 2007. Eye witness account as contained in the reports of both local and international monitors confirmed this assertion. In the reports of the Coalition of Election Monitors, the elections were described as: "a charade and did not meet the minimum standards required for democratic election". (205)

Election rigging to produce the wrong leaders, intimidation of perceived opponents, administrative incompetence, and killing of activists and journalists represent just a few of the vices of most African leaders. The ratio of extra judicial killings under various leaderships, when compared, may be lopsided. What is particularly troubling is that these failures occur not despite independence but often because of the ways in which independence has been managed. The promises of liberation have been betrayed by those who inherited power, and ordinary citizens continue to suffer the consequences.

The thematic convergence between Ike and Beti's advocacy becomes especially evident when considering their shared commitment to exposing postcolonial governance failures. Both authors recognize that transferring political power from colonial authorities to indigenous elites did not automatically translate into genuine liberation for ordinary citizens. Instead, new forms of oppression emerged, often replicating colonial exploitation structures. Ike's critique of educational corruption and Beti's condemnation of authoritarianism both address this fundamental betrayal of independence promises. Their novels serve as warnings against complacency and calls to vigilance, reminding readers that political sovereignty without social justice is empty.

What distinguishes these novelists' advocacy is their refusal to romanticize either the precolonial past or the postcolonial present. Unlike some African writers who idealize traditional societies as utopian alternatives to modern corruption, Ike and Beti maintain critical distance from all forms of power, traditional, colonial, and neocolonial. This critical stance allows them to identify problems wherever they emerge, holding all segments of society accountable. Their advocacy is democratic in orientation, rejecting the notion that any group or institution has inherent moral authority that exempts it from criticism. This commitment to universal accountability represents one of the most valuable aspects of their literary project.

Furthermore, Ike and Beti's advocacy extends beyond criticism to envision what African societies could become. While they are unsparing in condemning corruption, hypocrisy, and oppression, they also suggest through their narratives the possibility of redemption and renewal. Characters that resist corruption, maintain integrity under pressure, and speak truth to power embody the values these novelists promote. By creating such characters, Ike and Beti provide readers with models of ethical behaviour, demonstrating that resistance to oppression is possible and that individual integrity can make a difference. This combination of critique and constructive vision makes their novels truly effective instruments of social advocacy.

From this discussion, we can conclude that African literary artists who engage in advocating for quality leadership, such as those whose works provide material for this discourse, are fighting a good fight that must be replicated by other writers and encouraged by readers. As Agho advises in *The Novel in Africa*, writers and other cultural custodians should try "to cue in to the general reorientation of the African people now being canvassed, for the good of the entire continent." (227).

As noted earlier, many of Mongo Beti's novels centre on protest, not only against the French colonial administration but also its postcolonial aftermath. In *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*, he attacks the hostile, irresponsible, and high handed regime of Baba Tura, a fictional version of Ahmadu Ahidjo, Cameroon's first president. Beti uses Perpetua's suffering in forced marriage as a metaphor for the general unhappiness experienced by citizens that has persisted even with political sovereignty, deflating the optimistic expectations of independence. From this preoccupation, a feminist theme emerges. Feminism as literary theory represents activism that emphasizes equality between sexes in every aspect of human participation, public and private. Although both sexes are mentioned, we can say that feminist activism has favoured women more. To support

this, Robert Diyanmi, in "Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry and Drama," writes that "feminist criticism examines the social, economic, and cultural aspects of literary works, especially for what they reveal about women's role, position, and influence." (2090)

In *Perpetua...*, Beti exposes the struggles of a promising young woman forced into premature marriage by a ruthlessly greedy and status seeking mother. Beti uses Perpetua's uninterrupted unhappiness to expose neocolonial repression by an indigenous African ruler. Much of African postcolonial literature has repeatedly lamented this unfortunate condition. The body of fiction that emphasizes the realities of Africans' postcolonial experience has become known as post-independence novels of disillusionment. Agho provides context for its emergence in his inaugural lecture "From Protest to Assent: Unraveling the African Novel as a Protean Art," explaining that:

The attainment of political independence or what radical scholars call flag independence has not brought about any remarkable change in the lives of the people since it has not led to any economic improvement in their situations, but merely replaces the colonial patterns with neo-colonialism.... It was the writer's realization of the continuation of the colonial status quo, even in the new dispensation, that accounted for the euphoria that accompanied the attainment of political independence by African countries and brought about a change in the vision and role of the writer. (13)

This scenario produced novels such as Achebe's highly satirical *A Man of the People*, Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, and Edo born radical novelist Festus Iyayi's *Violence*, to name a few. Notably, some of Beti's novels including *Remember Ruben*, *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*, and *Lament for an African Pol* also contain elements of disillusionment. Beti, unfortunately, has only been recognized for denouncing the French colonial administration firmly anchored on Assimilation policy, not for criticizing indigenous postcolonial administrations. This may explain why he does not appear on Agho's list of ten postcolonial novelists. This study provides an opportunity to present him as a novelist of disillusionment, revealing the full range of his critical engagement with African realities.

The significance of Beti's feminist advocacy in *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness* extends beyond immediate critique of patriarchal oppression to encompass broader condemnation of authoritarian governance. Perpetua's

forced marriage allegorizes the condition of all citizens under Baba Tura's regime, compelled to submit to arbitrary authority regardless of their wishes or welfare. The habit of unhappiness pervading the novel refers not only to Perpetua's personal suffering but to the collective misery of a nation trapped under authoritarian rule. By focusing on a woman's experience, Beti highlights how gender oppression intersects with political oppression, demonstrating that women's subjugation is not isolated but part of a larger domination system affecting all vulnerable members of society. This intersectional advocacy distinguishes Beti's work and contributes to its enduring relevance.

Comparing Ike and Beti reveals that despite operating in different colonial contexts and linguistic traditions, both share a fundamental commitment to social justice and recognition of literature's potential to contribute to its realization. Their works demonstrate that African challenges are interconnected and that solutions require collective effort and mutual solidarity. The thematic convergence between Ike's Anglophone Nigerian setting and Beti's Francophone Cameroonian context suggests that the postcolonial condition is a shared experience transcending colonial boundaries, and that African writers have a common responsibility to address the continent's challenges through artistic practice.

Conclusion

This study has shown that literature achieves one of its most important purposes when it moves beyond entertainment to engage with the realities of society. Chukwuemeka Ike and Mongo Beti demonstrate this through novels that confront the political, economic, and social problems of their societies. Their works reveal that the African novelist does not write from outside the struggles of the community but from within them, responding to the conditions that shape everyday life. Their literary advocacy addresses corruption, poor leadership, exploitation, extortion, electoral malpractice, economic hardship, and the widespread disappointment that followed political independence. Through their characters and narratives, both writers expose the distance between the promises of independence and the realities experienced by ordinary Africans. Their criticism, however, is not simply an expression of despair. It also points towards the possibility of a better society founded on accountability, justice, integrity, and a stronger sense of communal responsibility.

The comparative reading of Ike and Beti reveals that, despite their different national, colonial, and linguistic backgrounds, both writers are deeply concerned with the misuse of power and its consequences for ordinary people.

Ike's Nigerian setting and Beti's Cameroonian setting may differ, but the problems represented in their novels often speak to a shared postcolonial experience. Both writers show how political independence can lose its meaning when new African elites reproduce forms of exploitation and inequality that existed under colonial rule. Their novels therefore encourage readers to look beyond the formal achievement of independence and ask whether political freedom has translated into social and economic freedom. In this sense, their advocacy remains relevant because many of the issues they confronted have not disappeared. Corruption, political manipulation, economic inequality, abuse of power, and the marginalization of ordinary citizens continue to shape public life in many African societies.

The postcolonial and subaltern perspectives adopted in this study have also helped to demonstrate how Ike and Beti bring marginalized experiences into literary visibility. Their novels draw attention to people, whose voices are often ignored in political and social discussions, including the poor, women, workers, and other vulnerable members of society. By placing these experiences within the centre of their narratives, the writers question the authority of those who control political and economic power. Their advocacy is therefore not limited to exposing wrongdoing; it also restores attention to the humanity of those who suffer its consequences. This is particularly important because the problems represented in their novels are not merely statistics or political abstractions. They affect families, relationships, livelihoods, dignity, and people's hopes for the future. Literature gives these experiences a human face and encourages readers to see social problems from the perspective of those who live through them.

The study further establishes that literary advocacy has considerable power, although that power has its limits. A novel cannot by itself remove corruption, reform a government, or transform an unjust society. Its strength lies rather in its ability to make readers see familiar problems differently and to question conditions they may have accepted as normal. Through character, dialogue, irony, satire, and narrative conflict, Ike and Beti turn social criticism into experiences that readers can recognize and feel. This remains significant in the contemporary world, even with the growth of digital media and other forms of communication. The novel continues to provide space for sustained reflection on complicated social realities. Yet the effectiveness of such advocacy ultimately depends on readers who are willing to move from awareness to reflection and, where possible, from reflection to action. Reading, therefore, can become more than an act of entertainment when it encourages a deeper sense of responsibility towards society.

The study also points to the continuing responsibility of African writers to engage with the changing realities of the continent. While Ike and Beti confronted the problems of their own periods, contemporary writers face additional concerns, including environmental degradation, technological change, widening inequality, migration, and new forms of political and economic exploitation. This does not mean that older African novels have become irrelevant. On the contrary, their continued engagement with questions of power, justice, leadership, and human dignity provides useful points of departure for understanding present conditions. Their works can also remain valuable in classrooms, where they can encourage students to read critically while developing a greater awareness of the societies in which they live.

Finally, Chukwuemeka Ike and Mongo Beti demonstrate that the African novelist can be both an artist and a social critic. Their novels remind us that literature can question power, expose injustice, preserve difficult memories, and keep social concerns alive when public attention begins to fade. Their advocacy does not offer easy solutions, but it refuses silence in the face of problems that affect ordinary people. As African societies continue to confront the unfinished business of independence and the challenges of contemporary governance, the questions raised by Ike and Beti remain worth asking. Their literary legacy therefore lies not only in the stories they told but also in their insistence that writers and readers have a place in the larger struggle for a society characterized by justice, dignity, accountability, and freedom.

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